

## ***Legislative Committee 8: Advocacy & Justice***

### **JUSTICE TEAM**

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The Justice Team, as part of the realignment of responsibilities within the Connectional Ministries of the Kentucky Annual Conference, is presently focusing on three primary areas of responsibility: Refugee & Immigration, Creation Care and our Social Principles. While other areas of concern may be added in the future, it was felt that by concentrating on these areas that we could best address the Four Areas of Focus of the UMC.

#### **Refugee & Immigration Issues**

With attention on the four areas of focus of the United Methodist Church, the Justice Team of the Kentucky Conference continues its effort to plan and implement vital initiatives and ongoing efforts that address migration issues and concerns for our disenfranchised brothers and sisters. By welcoming refugees, immigrants (including undocumented immigrants), asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons, we uphold our theological grounding - our hospitality for our newly arrived neighbors is supported by the sacred texts of all faiths (*Matthew 25:35; Luke 10:37; Leviticus 19:33-34*), and is rooted in the inherent integrity and human rights of all individuals.

Root causes of migration, such as economic opportunity, political turmoil, family reunification, war and environmental crisis, beg for our prayerful and dedicated attention. These are why this work with and for our immigrant neighbors is so important. With emphasis on ministry with the poor and with the development of principled Christian leaders for the church and the world, we must be willing and ready to work and serve with enthusiasm and grace for a future with hope.

Specifically, the Justice Team looks forward to equipping laity and pastors to move beyond their own church walls to reach new people, including refugees and immigrants. We will do the following:

1. Work with the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) and Justice for Our Neighbors (JFON) for education, training and assistance with projects and other events and activities to benefit the community as a whole; work with United Methodist Global Board of Church and Society while advocating for fair and just immigration laws and practice; work with the Kentucky Faith Communities Immigration Coalition for the creation of a more welcoming state, and work with immigration service providers in local communities for friendship and practical assistance to refugees resettling locally.
2. Educate and train United Methodist congregations, other faith congregations and community organizations by providing ongoing periodic information and forums for citizens to voice concerns and confront the problems of racism and xenophobia as obstacles to building community.
3. Implement Refugee Resettlement Consultations in local UMC churches, other faith congregations and community organizations.
4. Provide sponsorships for refugees through local congregations.
5. Assist local churches to obtain funding in order to develop and implement projects that will benefit refugees and/or other immigrants.

6. Make available mission and justice grants to local churches seeking ministries in the areas of mission and justice with specific emphasis on “making disciples of Christ for the transformation of the world.”

### **Creation Care**

The KAC Creation Care Ministry Team was initiated in September of 2008 by a member of the KAC Justice Team, Donna Aros. The CC Ministry Team is an open group, made up of both lay and clergy, and including camp and conference staff. We gathered around a shared passion of caring for God’s Creation, both in the lives of our individual families, and wanting to get our local congregations and the Conference more involved in Creation Care as a faith and justice issue. The first KAC Creation Care Conference was held at Loucon in March 2008, and we wanted to build on that event. The Second Annual KAC Creation Care Conference was planned by the CC Ministry Team, and held at Kavanaugh on April 18, 2009. In addition to working with our camps to gain from their expertise, and to hold this kind of gathering, we also identified the value of becoming a central source for educational materials conference-wide, and of providing connection and support for local church Creation Care groups. Two members have attended the SEJ Creation Care Conference at Lake Junaluska, and we hope to send more in the next year.

The Team will be using the [kyumc.org](http://kyumc.org) website to offer such things as lists of available printed resources, selected worship aids, listings for upcoming events and conferences around the UMC, and to promote a new KAC Green Church Initiative, patterned on those of other conferences to encourage local churches in their efforts to grow as caregivers of God’s Creation. We want to become more involved in environmental issues that affect our communities, such as the mining practice known as mountaintop removal that was witnessed to us by two Eastern Kentucky UM laypeople at our ‘08 event. The connections between energy use, buying habits, flooding, loss of woodland, and the effects of climate change seem overwhelming. We pray and we work together to find God’s way in the world!

### **Our Social Principles**

Our Social Principles are one of the defining marks of United Methodists, yet they are not widely taught or explored in our local congregations. The Justice Team has discussed how reluctance to enter into potentially divisive political and social issue discussions accounts for much of this silence. During the next year, the Team will be exploring how we can lead local congregations into small group discussions on the ‘hard’ issues of our time that are addressed in our Social Principles in ways that affirm that Christians may disagree yet still remain in connection. We are exploring an approach that combines the Social Principles with such generally available materials as Adam Hamilton’s *Seeing Gray in a World of Black and White*. We then envision district training events for adult small group leaders that teach them how to work with anxiety and conflict in a congregational setting. Our model for that work is the recent workshop led by Dr. Crain Gillilam of the Center for Pastoral Effectiveness of the Louisiana Annual Conference. Our hope is that by using the Social Principles as a vehicle, we can also increase our local congregations’ willingness to openly discuss Justice issues because they have the communication and interactional skills to do so in a non-destructive manner.

*For information only*